R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 017 425 RE 001 152

THE EFFECT OF HOMOGENEOUS GROUPING ON CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES.

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PUB DATE FEB 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.40 8P.

DESCRIPTORS- *ELEMENTARY GRADES, *READING RESEARCH, *LEARNING DIFFICULTIES, HOMOGENEOUS GROUPING, HETEROGENEOUS GROUPING, *ABILITY GROUPING, READING ACHIEVEMENT, LESSON PLANS, ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION,

THE EFFECT OF CLASSROOM GROUPING ON CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES WAS STUDIED. EMPHASIS WAS PLACED ON THE ACQUISITION OF INFORMATION, METHODS OF SELECTION, AND TEACHING TECHNIQUES. DATA WERE GATHERED FROM SCHOOL RECORDS AND FROM GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL TESTS. FIFTEEN PUPILS WERE PLACED IN A "SPECIAL" CLASS, AND 15 WERE DISTRIBUTED AMONG REGULAR THIRD-GRADE CLASSES. TEACHERS WERE GIVEN SUPERVISORY HELP IN DEVELOPING A SERIES OF LESSONS. THE EVALUATION OF ACHIEVEMENT INDICATED THAT HOMOGENEOUS GROUPING DID NOT RESULT IN SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES. REFERENCES ARE INCLUDED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES CONFERENCE (BOSTON, FEBRUARY 1968). (BK)

ED017425

ACLD FEB 26 1968

Area for Children with Learning Disabilities

THE EFFECT OF HOMOGENEOUS GROUPING ON CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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FEBRUARY 1967

RE 001 152

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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The Effect of Homogeneous Grouping on Children with Learning Disabilities

Last year, the Hunter College Educational Clinic studied the effect of classroom grouping on children with learning disabilities. Our interest was twofold: to determine the optimal placement for these youngsters, and to investigate the use of special educational techniques in regular heterogeneous classes. We found no significant differences in reading achievement between homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping. These results are not surprising and agree with those of Borg, Justman, and Goldberg. On the other hand, we were surprised by the wealth of important information obtained by simple procedures. During the study we refined our techniques of diagnosis and treatment and this afternoon I would like to tell you our experience with particular emphasis on acquisition of information, methods of selection, and teaching techniques.

We conducted the study in an affiliated public school with the usual urban population. Dr. June Fite initiated the study in 1964. To select pupils with learning disabilities, we screened the entire first grade population of 99 pupils. The most useful data came from the school record cards and from two tests. Through the years we have learned to utilize the cumulative record cards which represent an invaluable and frequently neglected source of basic socio-psychological and educational data. It would take many long hours to obtain in any other way the information which is instantly available on these cards. We could identify the cultural and emotional environment in noting the birthplace, parental background, familial composition, birth order and language spoken in the home. Records of mobility, past achievement, oral expression, grades repeated, readiness scores which provide an assessment of functioning and health records are some of the data revealed by careful reading.

Testing was done in two phases: first, screening using group instruments and

teacher's ratings; and then intensive appraisal, using more diagnostic tools.

The two group tests which were particularly useful were the Queens College Visual Motor Test and the Goodenough Harris Drawing Test. The Visual Motor Test, developed by Dr. Albert Harris, is an experimental visual motor test made up of figures to be copied. These include geometric forms of varying degrees of difficulty, Bender-like designs, and letters and numbers which are often reversed. This provided us with a measure of eye-hand coordination, visual perception and visual attention; all important diagnostic criteria. The Goodenough, more familiarly known as Draw-A-Person Test, gives a rough estimate of intelligence, as expressed in standard scores. Qualitative aspects of the drawing provide clues to motor control and coordination, body awareness and, as Myklebust says, the figure drawing "is an indicator of total psychoneurological status." The drawing is particularly valuable in bilingual children and is sensitive in revealing deficits in visual perceptual abilities and visual memory.

On the other hand, the Wepman Auditory Discrimination Test was not useful with this population. Many of our children made so many errors that their scores would be considered invalid, according to Wepman's standards. Using these instruments and a standardized reading test, we identified 34 of the 99 as having potential learning problems, particularly in the field of reading. The following year, 30 of these children showed retardation in reading at the second grade level, as measured by the standardized tests. Therefore, the first conclusion was that this combination of tests can be an effective screening instrument in the possible identification of children with learning disabilities in an urban, low economic, multi-ethnic population. The follow up procedure, utilizing the usual instruments, tapped additional areas of: laterality, language development, auditory attention and perception, visual perception and general intelligence.

With the vagaries of public school attendance, the next year there were only six survivors still available for our study. We added 24 from other non-readers

who had had comparable evaluation. They were evaluated from all possible points of view: etiological, diagnostic and remedial. At the third grade level this group of 30 was divided into two groups of 15 each who were matched for sex, IQ, ethnic group, and reading level. Fifteen of the children were placed in a "special class," all diagnosed as children with learning disabilities. The remaining 15, similarly diagnosed, were randomly distributed throughout four other third grade classes. The latter 15 represented the control population.

Throughout the year members of the Hunter College Educational Clinic and the consultant from the Department of Special Education worked directly with teachers of all groups. In the course of the year we developed a series of lessons, which I feel are useful in working with children with learning disabilities.

Reading instruction in the basal reader took place three hours a week with additional time allotted for individualized skill work and activities in the other language arts areas.

Consultation with the college faculty enabled the teacher to develop special rexographed sheets which provided practice in visual discrimination and sequential processes. To develop left to right discrimination, visual memory and perception of form, arrows were drawn when new sight words were presented. Configuration clues were stressed as a learning device. To develop auditory perception and discrimination in bilateral postural integration, the game of "Simon Says" emphasized understanding of the directional prepositions, "on, under, over, beside." Experience charts were used as frequently as possible; copying from the blackboard was eliminated as much as possible. To provide practice in accuracy of visual recognition and visual discrimination, the children used Continental Press stencils listed at readiness level, first with pictures, then with individual letters, and finally with words. Picture matching, dominoes and lotto were other popular tasks to develop these skills. Puzzles enabled the children to develop skills in sensory integrative mechanisms in visual analysis and synthesis, and figure ground

relationships. At the outset, most of these children could not distinguish between capital and lower case letters. Matching exercises with commercial games, played alone or with the classroom volunteer or in groups, provided opportunities for learning.

Some children who were non-readers had special remedial training with the reading consultant. These lessons focussed on vocabulary concept development and included skill sections in word recognition, with emphasis on initial consonants. The lessons were divided into the following phases:

1. Teaching the concept

    a) Introduction of the concept, of color (or animals, or clothing, or boats, or toys)

        1. Providing a concrete example of concept, i.e. the crayon, colored red
        2. Providing examples of similarities and differences, i.e. red and blue

            a) What is the same about them?
            b) What is different about them?

        3. Developing a categorical sense

            a) What are they all called?
            b) Finding other examples of color, in room, in clothing, in furniture

2. Introducing the sight words

    a) The sight words red, blue, green are introduced in context. The contextual sentences are read aloud with emphasis on the sight vocabulary.

        1. The sight word is taught by the visual motor method.
        2. Alternate forms of the sight word are written in capitals, in lower case letters. A matching game is played.

3. Teaching the initial consonant

    a) This is taught in the classical way, using the four processes to teach a phonic element; auditory discrimination, auditory visual discrimination, auditory visual blending and contextual application.

4. Adding enrichment

    a) The concept is used in additional exercises

        1. In training visual discrimination (Which is lighter? Which is darker?)

2. In auditory discrimination (Can you tell me what this sound is?)
3. In spatial discrimination (Playing hot and cold: "I am thinking of something in the room which is green. When you come close I'll say, hot, etc.")

5. Reinforcing the teaching

a) For reinforcement, a Go Fish game, available in Five and Ten Cent stores which has colored cards with the names of the colors on the cards and is played like Old Maid. With concepts of clothing, furniture, etc., commercial lotto games or puzzles are used.

To evaluate the growth in reading achievement, we used the Metropolitan Achievement Test. In our opinion, this is an easily administered test which, according to Robinson, gives generally high reliability at the early levels for all socio-economic strata. In evaluating the individual children, we used the conventional psychological battery but we found that we gained a great deal of supplementary information from an Interview Questionnaire originally developed by the Community Service Society Research Staff and the East Harlem Demonstration School Project. Sample questions such as "What do you do after school is over? Which one in your family is the strongest? Who would you like to be like?" give a wealth of information about the reality and fantasy life situation as seen from the child's perspective. It also provides another viewpoint to compare performances on structured and unstructured material which indirectly reflects ego strength. The questionnaire is administered in an hour's interview conducted by the psychologist in her initial contact with the child. Asking these questions gave the examiner an opportunity to observe functionally, behaviorally and clinically, language fluency, sequential patterns, articulation problems and idiosyncratic thought patterns. We could analyze the answers in reference to content and emotion, as well as linguistic characteristics and grammatical complexity, all of which are important to assessment. We would like to suggest that the use of this structured interview gives an insight into areas which are not tapped by the standard psychological battery.

In evaluating our results we are not surprised that a homogeneous grouping does not result in significant differences in achievement as there is an inconsistency in the growth pattern on the subsections of the test, according to Justman. Finally, to return to the question of grouping, our cumulative experience over the years has led us to the conclusion that: grouping alone will not improve the achievement of children with learning disabilities; significant modification of curriculum may, and greater individualization of teaching will, undoubtedly help to solve the problem.

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